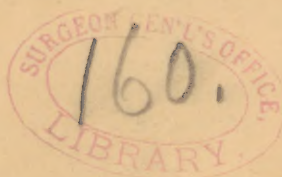


Case (The) of
Congressman Black.





Washington, D.C.

THE CASE OF CONGRESSMAN BLACK.

This case is one of peculiar and special interest, inasmuch as the cause of his sudden and continued illness may be traced to the alleged unsanitary condition of the house in which he lived. It must, however, be stated that he was a dyspeptic, and during the past few years had frequently suffered from severe attacks of sudden illness, usually following indiscretions in diet. In January last he consulted a physician in this city, by whom he was informed of the nature of his digestive trouble, and also that his heart was very weak and would not bear any violent strain. Under the general directions of his physician his health had improved. On Friday morning, March 10, he walked from his dwelling, 1025 Vermont avenue, to the Capitol, and expressed himself as feeling better than he had for several years. About two o'clock he ate, at the House Restaurant, a half-dozen raw oysters. Soon after returning to his seat in the hall of the House of Representatives he felt uncomfortable, and went to the Library to examine some authorities, but continuing to grow worse he abandoned the effort, and as he returned to the hall bought and ate an orange. His discomfort increased, and at four o'clock he left the Capitol and walked to his lodgings, reaching there about five P. M. During his walk home he was nauseated, dizzy, and frequently staggered. He did not eat any dinner. Believing that the oysters had caused his sickness, he took an emetic of mustard and warm water; repeated it several times, and gagged himself frequently with his finger. He vomited freely and often, but did not get the relief expected. At ten o'clock a physician was summoned, who found him walking the floor in great distress. His pulse was forty and barely perceptible. The surface was blanched and cold as ice; lips and face perfectly white; nausea constant, with occasional violent retchings. Complained of tingling sensations and numbness of the left extremities, and was so restless that he could not be induced to remain in bed until admonished of the danger of continued disobedience, and, even then, he could not maintain any position longer than five seconds, but tossed about the bed in every conceivable manner and form. After occasional violent retchings he would fall back in some position, in which he remained for a brief period. He experienced no pain, and denied having had a chill or having felt cold. His mind was perfectly clear, and every question was answered calmly and fully. This condition continued without abatement, notwithstanding the employment of various remedies, both external and internal, until 1 A. M., 11th March, when after the administration of a powerful heart stimulant, his pulse rose to forty-eight in a minute, the jactitation gradually ceased, his respiration improved, and at six o'clock his pulse was sixty-four, surface moderately warm, and he slept quietly. At this hour the physician left him, to be again called at eight, when he was found to be completely paralyzed on the left side. Sensation and motion were entirely lost in both left extremities. The paralysis involved the sphincters of the bladder and rectum, muscles of the left side of the chest, neck, and partially of the left side of the face. The motion of the tongue was but slightly, if at all, disturbed. Articulation was indistinct because of the partial left facial paralysis. Reaction was complete; his pulse was good and the temperature of his body but slightly above the normal. This condition continued without any important change until 1 P. M., Sunday, 12th. After a transient coldness his temperature rose rapidly to 103.5°, and gradually subsided, falling to normal at 8 A. M., 13th. The paralysis had extended to the right side. He was left without voluntary power below the neck. He could express assent by a slight nodding and dissent by a slighter rotary movement of the head, but could not retain his head in any position, even upon the pillow, without artificial

support. The muscles of respiration were also involved, and life was only maintained during the day by artificial respiration, and frequent stimulation of the respiratory and circulatory centres. After Monday, 13th, mechanical means were not necessary, but remedies were employed at varying intervals daily until the 20th to maintain the circulation and respiration. In fact, for the first ten days, life seemed purely artificial. During this time, and until the 26th, a physician was by his side night and day, always ready for a threatening emergency. 20

4/ His fever rose at 12 P. M., 13th, to 101.4° , fell to 100° at 3 A. M.; 14th, again rose to 101.4° at 6 A. M., to fall to 98.8° at 9 A. M. From this time till 5 P. M., 17th, the temperature of his body varied between 98.2° and 100.2° , his pulse between 106 and 128, and his respiration between 20 and 36. On the 17th, between the hours of 1.30 A. M. and 2.30 P. M., another exacerbation occurred, his temperature rising from 98.4° to 102.2° and falling to 98.8° . During the 18th his temperature was generally below 98° . At 3 P. M. on the 19th, and at 12 M. 20th, the temperature was 100.4° . Since the 20th he has had no fever.

During the illness his intellect has been perfectly clear, not even obscured either during the periods of collapse or of high fever.

After the disappearance of fever he gradually regained the faculty of speech, but not until the 26th of March was there any evidence of returning power, first shown in regaining control of the sphincters, then in the right thumb, and now, April 3rd, he can move most of the fingers of each hand, and the feet very slightly; can extend his legs, straighten his back, and hold and turn his head at pleasure on a pillow. Since 26th life has been maintained without artificial aids, and he has gained daily. Electro-muscular contractility and sensibility are good in all the voluntary muscles. Sensation is nearly normal. Appetite and digestion good. He is encouraged by the prospects of ultimate and complete recovery.

Mr. Black occupied the second floor of the house as a dwelling, and had an office room in the basement, in which he passed many hours in the morning before going to the Capitol, and at night after the adjournment of the House of Representatives. Senator Grover occupied the parlor floor, and Capt. Hooper the third floor. The Senator has been ill for several weeks, some member of Black's family has been sick since moving into the house, and on March 18th scarlet fever broke out in the family of Capt. Hooper. The house is supplied with fixed washstands in every room and water-closets and bath-rooms on each floor. In the basement office are also permanent fixtures. The house is filled with unpleasant odors from cellar to garret, and has been condemned by the authorities as an unfit habitation.

The theory of the writer is that Mr. Black was poisoned by the atmosphere of the house, that he had a chill on the day he was taken sick, followed by congestion, and subsequently, by acute inflammation of the spinal cord. It must also be said that he came from a malarious district, in which malarial and typhoid fevers were very prevalent during the Autumn. Two of his children had been sick with malarial fever previous to the occupancy of the house referred to.

He is now comfortably located in a house believed to be free from any noxious emanations, and hopes are entertained of his complete recovery.

It ought to be stated in this connection that the Health Department has made frequent unsuccessful efforts to secure from Congress authority to inspect private dwellings and to enforce such recommendations as might be necessary for the protection of human life, but Congress has refused such authority, except for new houses, whereas the houses built previous to the past two years are those most frequently found in an unsanitary condition. The Health Department has always, when requested, made the inspection of suspected dwellings, but can only offer suggestions without power to enforce the recommendations for the correction of any defect discovered.

